

The New Olympian

March 2009

The Monthly Newsletter of the Olympic View Community Church of the Brethren
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Living the Word

By Pastor Ken Miller Rieman

The season of Lent is upon us. Drenched in the heaviness of words like 'sin' and 'repentance,' and the certain knowledge that our journey takes us toward Jesus' death, Lent can be a hard season. Those of us who have grown up in the church may well be used to the traditions of fasting, or of giving up some thing in our lives which has idolatrous energy.

Hard and heavy things indeed, especially when their contemplation or practice so easily stands as an obstacle to those for whom 'church' seems only to be a place of judgment and narrow-mindedness.

Considered more deeply, the opposite emerges. Lent is a time that positions us for recovery and renewal. Let's clear away some of the linguistic rubbish that hides the good news. While some meaning can be lost in translation, the greater danger in communication comes from not trying to translate at all.

'Sin' is a problem, and I'm talking about more than the thing itself. Our culture has such a problem with the word, that we have a hard time even talking about what the word represents. Its Hebrew root means 'missing the mark.' Sadly, many churches have employed the name 'sin' as a form of social control, used to guilt peo-



ple into certain behavior or limit their access to full participation in the life of the community.

Similarly, 'repentance' suggests the hoops through which those seeking forgiveness and grace of their spiritual leaders must jump. But sin is simply that which stands in the way of our healthy and loving relationships with God and others. Paul uses the word 'righteousness' to describe 'right' relationships. The Hebrew word which describes the state of rightness is 'Shalom,' often translated as 'Peace.'

So sin can be different things for different people. That doesn't mean everything is relative or that we can only decide for ourselves what is sinful. It means that the criteria for what is sinful is rooted in what stands in the way of healthy and loving relationships.

(Continued on page 2)

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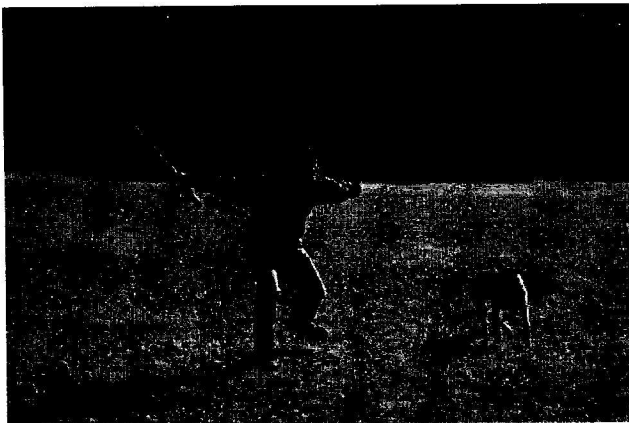
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(Continued from page 1)

But sin can trip us up in another way: the apostle Paul observed that the very times when he tried hardest to do what was right were the times when he most easily fell prey to the habits and false promises which led him away from right relationships.

Those who have gone bowling or played darts know the principal involved. Hitting your mark sometimes requires a surrender, or a 'letting go' more than trying harder. Living into love's way requires more than a condemnation of evil. It requires that we repent, or turn away from the things which we've grown convinced can satisfy us, and with open hearts turn toward the things which actually unite us with the divine and each



other. acting on faith. It requires that we move away from our fears and toward the promises of love.

Perhaps during this season of Lent you would consider letting go of something that you suspect stands in the way of your being in healthier relationship with family or neighbors, near or far. And perhaps, more importantly, you'll find some practice which you could embrace, if only during Lent, which might demonstrate your movement toward the promise of love.

Since my parents' deaths in December, I've become deeply convinced about the value of communicating with family and friends. Too often, I've let my schedule run me, rather than me run my schedule. Communication takes time, and I have decided to make more time in my schedule for it.



other.

Inasmuch as this requires trusting in things which we've not yet learned to trust, it requires



How about you? Are you ready to embrace a practice for living in honor of the Love which makes our living worth the while? Do you need to try letting go of something which makes it harder for you to be healthy and loving? Would you like the help of a spiritual family to support such a change?

Let us know. That's what brothers and sisters can offer each other. That's what it means for us to repent, to turn from sin, and embrace life. For disciples of Jesus, our journey moves through seasons of surrender as love positions us for new life.

Fear grows out of the things we think...Compassion grows out of the things we are... Michael Garrison

